AP US History

Chapter 16 Questions

1. Describe the demographics of those populating the American West in the late 1800s.

Some of the changes in demographics were that the West was widely diverse and the population was scattered around the West. There were many ethnic groups, such as groups that came from Mexico, Asia (mostly China), French and British Canadians, and Indians (also later, more nations from Europe had begun to arrive). There was up to 300,000 Indians living in the West but in the late 1800s, only about 150,000 remained. The Mexican population was about 50,000 in the 1840s, by 1900, the population had increased to nearly 100,000. There was already a number of Chinese in the West, but very few, by the 1880s, the number had increased to more than 200,000. Before the Civil War there was a large amount of Europeans, mainly from England and French in the West but later more European nations, such as Germans and Irish had come to the west, the was now 2 million between 1870 and 1900.

1. Describe the growth of a capitalist economy in the West (include how the government promoted this growth).

The birth of the capitalist economy in the West was mostly caused by mining and herding cattle. Since mining has the potential to make you rich, this is obviously involved with self-interest, after all, a lot of people (mostly men) had gone and left everything behind to try and be rich; herding was also in self-interest as well. There was also a lot of competition, tons of miners had come to try and get gold and silver; herders had also deal with other herders and farmers for land for their cattle. Since there was a demand for gold and silver by the government and wealthy people, so the miners supplied them with it; while herders had received money for their wool and cattle as well. The federal government had promoted this growth by adding new laws that made it easier to pay for new land. Also they had tried to establish more railroads so that more people could settle there.

1. What was the allure of the West for migrants from the eastern U.S.? For immigrants from Asia?

The allure of the West for eastern migrants was the new opportunities to basically get rich quick. It was the same for immigrants from Asia. Settlers were attracted to the silver and gold deposits that started to be discovered in the West, which would help anyone become rich and fast should they find a large amount. Another factor that helped made the West popular was the fertile land in the meadowlands of the mountains or the sod placed on the plains, which was good for farming or ranching. Another factor was that the West’s landscape. It was called many names such as the Great Plains or the Sierra Nevada, these names had sound attracting to the East as it made the West sound interesting and that it was a spectacular place. Another factor was the so-called cowboy culture. The cowboy was seen as a popular hero in America, as they was called as a semi-educated man that had natural decency, courage and compassion-that every day was an adventure and that they were having the time of their lives. Also it was because the West was America’s last frontier. For Asian immigrants, they came because there were problems within their own country, and increases in immigration to the USA began where gold was discovered in CA and the thought of being rich quick. Also it was because there were job opportunities in America.

1. What were the reasons for the transition from subsistence farming to commercial farming in the West? What were the effects of this change?

The most common reason for this transition was because it was hard to farm on the plains. Before the invention of barbed wire, it was hard for farmers to keep cattle away from their crops. Another problem was that they had to rely on irrigation for water since there wasn’t a lot in the West. A disaster had broken out in 1887- a series of droughts had changed the now fertile land back into its former arid self. It was hard for farmers to use subsistence farming and was forced to use commercial farming. The effects were not good as they eventually overproduced goods and in the 1880s the prices for most agricultural goods significantly went down causing farmers to become severely affected by this.